

Christ the King Sunday-November 21, 2021

Baltic and East Nidaros Lutheran Parish

John 18:33-37

“My Kingdom, My Voice”

Sermon by Pastor Randall J. Questad

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen

Our church year always ends with Christ the King Sunday. This year’s ending gospel reading, depending on how you want to look at it, takes us back to or advances us to Holy Week and the trial of Jesus before Pilate. The end of the church year reveals some of the confusion of what Jesus’ main reason for coming down from heaven to earth. In today’s reading there is an exchange of questions between Pilate and Jesus where Jesus never says what Pilate wants him to say. Pilate wants Jesus to confess that he is not just a king, but a king of this world.

We often do the same today. We want Jesus to fit into what we believe is our truth. We want Jesus to be the king over our country. We believe Jesus will take sides and support one sports team over another. We want Jesus to deliver justice in this world in the places and for people we would like to see justice served. But whenever our expectations of Jesus don’t match up with what seems to be happening, we can be assured that we are not talking about the kingdom of God. We are talking about this world.

Pilate asks Jesus closed ended questions that require a yes or no answer. Pilate asked Jesus, “Are you the king of the Jews?” Simple enough. But Jesus knew that Pilate was confusing an earthly kingdom with God’s heavenly kingdom. And Jesus knew that Pilate’s ears were not yet open to understand how the reign of a heavenly king works. Pilate thought Jesus’ kingdom was the Jewish nation. Pilate declared that it was Jesus’ own nation, the Jewish nation, that handed him over. Pilate wanted to know what Jesus had done so that he could administer the appropriate sentence so that justice would be served.

Pilate never gets anywhere by questioning Jesus. Nor does Jesus defend himself against Pilate like what happens in most trials. Jesus tells Pilate that he is not from this world. Then several times Jesus uses the words, “My Kingdom” to let Pilate know that his kingdom is far different from his understanding of the kingdoms of this world.

Kingdoms that last for any length of time usually are led by strong leaders that are surrounded by people that rally around them and support their cause even if it means losing their lives. At the time that Jesus is now speaking with Pilate, Jesus is standing alone. Outspoken Peter isn’t present to support Jesus. By this time, Peter has already denied knowing Jesus two of the three times. John, who considered himself to be Jesus’ favorite disciple is nowhere to be found. Jesus stands before Pilate without making a defense because he is not of this world.

One of my favorite movie scenes is from the Robin Williams movie, Patch Adams. Patch Adams is essentially on trial for practicing medicine without a license and defies some of his authorities and rules they want him to abide by. Patch gives a compelling speech to the authorities and to the large room full of his supporters. At the end of the speech the doors of the already full room open and a crowd of patients that Patch has helped in unique ways enter the room showing support to those who have put him on trial.

This is not the case for Jesus. Not even Mary and Martha, his closest friends or Lazarus who Jesus was just raised from the dead testify for Jesus. Nor does Jesus call in any special witnesses to tell Pilate the good he has done in this world. Jesus doesn't need us to rush to his defense. It was always a part of God's eternal plan that Jesus would be delivered over to Pilate. Jesus told Pilate, "If my kingdom was of this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here."

When Pilate hears Jesus say, "My Kingdom" so many times, he thinks he has finally trapped Jesus and says to him, "So you are a king?" Again, Jesus skirts the yes or no question and answers him by saying, "You say that I am a king". Jesus does answer Pilate by describing the reason that he came to earth. Jesus said, "For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth." Jesus didn't come into the world to rally groups of supporters or people to defend him. Jesus didn't come into the world to serve as an example for us to model our lives after. Jesus came to speak to the truth.

The people of the kingdom of God know the voice of Christ their king. The people of God's kingdom do not hear Jesus teaching his followers how to enter his kingdom by being on a certain side of the injustices of this world. The people of God's kingdom listen to Jesus deliver words of mercy and it is only through hearing God's voice that they are received into the kingdom of God.

The theme of speaking about the last days of Jesus or the second coming of Jesus on Christ the King Sunday seems to coincide with what happens in our part of the world in November. The green life of summer has given way now to the bareness of the trees and the piles of dead leaves that blow from one place to another depending on the direction of the wind for the day. The days begin in the dark and before we finish supper at night the cold and dark of night cause us to forget any goodness of the day.

This may be all the more reason to trust in Christ the King, who not only is with us and for us when things go well for us, but he has promised to never leave us in the darkest and coldest days of our lives.

We will be confessing our faith today using the words of the Nicene Creed. Since we are members of God's kingdom, we do not fear Christ the king's second coming. Instead, we are thankful that our King did not come into the world so that justice would be served. Jesus was born to testify to the truth and the truth is that you and I are sinners and there is nothing we can do to change ourselves. Thanks be to God that we who hear the voice of Jesus and have been claimed children of his kingdom have received his unconditional words of mercy. That is why Jesus was born. Amen.